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Promoting Islamic Education within Multicultural Brunei Society Following the Implementation of the Shariah Law in 2013

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Abstract

The Syariah Penal Code Order, 2013 (SPCO 2013) has formally become the law of Brunei Darussalam, with its first phase of implementation commencing on 1st May 2014. This paper aims to explore the impact of SPCO 2013 on Islamic Education in Brunei. Therefore, this study discusses the Brunei education system prior to and since the implementation of the SPCO 2013 and aims to provide a critical analysis of the action taken by the Brunei government to bring about changes in both its secular and religious schools. Descriptive qualitative research is used to make more rigorous inferences about the research problems. Interviews have been conducted with the respective government officers for data collection. The data were collected and then analyzed using the thematic analysis technique. The findings of this study indicate that the SPCO 2013 has had an impact on the Brunei Education Curriculum in both of its Public Schools and Religious Schools. Therefore, the findings conclude that curriculum revision was crucial to ensure that it was in line with Islamic teachings and did not contain any elements that contradicted Shariah law, and this also helps to promote awareness and avoid misconception of the SPCO 2013 among non-Muslim students who are an integral part of the Brunei society.

Keywords: curriculum, the impact of the SPCO 2013, Islamic education, shariah, Brunei Syariah Penal Code Order

1. Introduction

The Brunei Syariah Penal Code Order 2013 (the SPCO 2013) was introduced in 2013 in addition to the country's existing Islamic Law (Ayus, 2018). The SPCO 2013 is a legal framework based on Islamic Shariah law that represents a significant shift towards its existing Islamic law under Brunei's legal system. The SPCO 2013 essentially consolidated the existing Islamic criminal offenses in Brunei. It filled in regulatory loopholes while bringing together those offenses covered by other Islamic and civil regulations. The introduction of this new law extended Brunei Islamic law by including aspects of criminal law and related punishment. The aims of the SPCO 2013 are basically to establish a legal system that is based on Islamic principles and values and to ensure that Bruneian society follows Islamic norms and traditions (Juned, 2014). This has changed the legal system in Brunei as a whole in a significant way including the Brunei education system as well.

The Brunei education system is based on the British education system and is divided into four main levels: pre-primary, primary, secondary, and tertiary education (Ministry of Education, Brunei Darussalam: Education System, 2024). Pre-primary education is one year long and is available for children aged 5 years old; it is not compulsory. Primary education is compulsory for all children aged 6–11 years old and lasts for six years. Secondary education in Brunei is divided into lower secondary and upper secondary. Lower secondary education encompasses two years of study. Students typically enter lower secondary school at around the age of 12, and upon completing lower secondary education, they progress to upper secondary education. Upper secondary education typically starts at the age of 14, and there are three programs available at the upper secondary level. First, The General Secondary Education Programme is divided into two categories, either the Express Track (two years) or the Normal Track (three years). Secondly, there is a three-year program called Applied Secondary Education. Students in both programs take the International General Certificate of Secondary Examination (IGCSE) and the Brunei Cambridge General Certificate of Education (BC-GCE) 'O' Level exams. Thirdly, there is a specialized option within the Special Applied Programme where students register under the PEARSON Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) Programme. It offers a unique approach tailored to students with special needs and learning challenges. Students who choose this route enroll in the program, which equips them with the necessary skills for technical and vocational education. The curriculum is modified to accommodate each student's abilities, following their individual education plan and remedial education plan. This ensures that the curriculum is suitable for their specific needs, allowing them to thrive in their educational journey. Post secondary education is of two years duration and starts at the age of 17 years old. Later, the students may proceed to Tertiary education, which is available at colleges and universities, both locally and abroad. The Ministry of Education in Brunei offers various pathways for students to further their studies. One common option is to pursue a diploma or degree program at a higher education institution such as a college or university. These programs provide specialized knowledge and skills in a particular field of study. Another option is to

enroll in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programs, which focus on practical skills development for specific careers.

Under the Brunei education system, there are two types of compulsory education. The first type is general education, which lasts twelve years and includes primary and secondary schooling, and the second type is Islamic religious primary education, which is required for Muslim students in Brunei and lasts seven years. For general education, all Bruneians (Muslim and non-Muslim) are required to attend Public Schools. As Islamic education is an important aspect of education in Brunei, the public schools offer Islamic education alongside their regular curriculum (the National Education System for the 21st Century SPN21, 2013). On the other hand, it is compulsory for Muslim students to attend religious schools. However, although non-Muslims are not required to attend religious schools, some of them do attend such schools voluntarily (Kumpoh, 2014). Government Religious Schools are the only places where one can receive an Islamic education. Overall, the general education system is managed by the Ministry of Education, while Islamic Education is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. In order to address different educational demands, these ministries work together to shape Brunei's educational system (Haji Mail, 2019).

Since the implementation of the SPCO 2013, there have been significant changes in various systems of the country including the education system. In general, new laws do have a profound impact on the systems of a country (Sutherland & Feltey, 2017), and Brunei is no exception, particularly when it comes to issues such as curriculum content. This paper investigates, in particular, how the new law affects its education curriculum. The government of Brunei has put measures into place to ensure that Islamic principles are incorporated into the curriculum and that religious studies are accorded more weight in the educational system (Yousif & Zainal, 2020). The education system now requires the teaching of Islamic religious education at all levels, from primary to post-secondary. As a matter of public concern, education must adapt to the changing needs of society, which necessitates the ongoing creation of new regulations (Retnawati et al., 2016). A revised curriculum is important because it helps to ensure that education remains relevant and responsive to the needs of students and society (Johnson, 2001). By updating the curriculum, educators can promote equity and inclusion and improve the quality of education for all learners.

Mulenga (2018) defines curriculum as all the carefully chosen, planned, integrative, creative, and evaluative educational experiences that are consciously or unconsciously offered to students under the control of the school in order to achieve the specified learning outcomes that can be attained through development, maturation, and learning that are designed to be most useful for life in a changing society. Education is the process through which people acquire knowledge, skills, values, habits, and attitudes, and, therefore, informational components must be incorporated according to societal mores, cultural norms, practical circumstances, and legal requirements (Borrowman, 1989).

Borrowman (1989) states that education must adapt to changes as new possibilities and challenges arise in order to best educate students.

Despite Brunei's education system having a rich history of incorporating Islamic values (Hassan, 2021), the formal implementation of Shariah law in 2014 represented a notable transformation. Prominent Bruneian scholars such as Hussainmiya (2019) and Noor (2018) emphasize that this shift illustrates Brunei's wider dedication to Islamic governance, influencing both policy and practice within the education sector. Recent studies also have investigated educational reform focused on improving Islamic education in Brunei (Phan et al., 2021). The studies indicate a notable focus on the incorporation of Islamic values and multicultural principles into the education system. Phan et al. (2021) emphasize the relationship between the national identity and the educational curriculum, highlighting the government's responsibility to promote Islamic education and values at all levels of schooling. Nevertheless, this does not directly address the impact of imposing SPCO2013 on the Brunei education system to the multicultural communities. Ali (2020) also critiques that the evolution of Islamic education to incorporate multiculturalism and inclusivity remains insufficiently examined in academic discourse.

Scholars also critiqued the absence of comprehensive studies on the role of the government in Islamic education and the significant gap in evaluating their actual implementation (Ahmed & Ibrahim, 2021). This study is also supported by Memon et al. (2021) on the significance of the government's participation in the reform of Islamic education in Muslim-majority countries. This research will highlight the strategies and measures implemented by the Bruneian government to promote Islamic education and balance religious values with the need for cultural diversity in education. This is also supported and discussed by Khatoun et al. (2020) on the importance of public awareness (promotion) of Islamic education and the curriculum in the educational system to non-Muslim society as the Islamic education system is perceived as a means to bring together the many cultural backgrounds of students (Adnan et al., 2021).

The focus of this study is to analyze these concerns by examining the impact of the SPCO2013 on Brunei's education curriculum, specifically investigating the roles of government in facilitating these reforms. It also explores the significance of promoting Islamic education to non-Muslims through curriculum, aiming to foster a more inclusive and multicultural society through these reforms. Within the context of Brunei's educational system, it also looks at how the government is trying to promote Islamic education to non-Muslim communities, with the goal of creating a more welcoming and diverse society. The overarching goal of the research is to determine how these changes would affect educational policies and the diversity of Brunei's society. This question effectively addresses both the changes in the education system due to SPCO 2013 and the broader societal implications, particularly how the reforms impact non-Muslim populations and contribute to Brunei's multicultural environment. This study aimed to analyze the steps taken by the government of Brunei to facilitate the reforms brought about by

SPCO2013 and how they have affected Islamic education in the country. The key research question was: "What has been the impact of the Syariah Penal Code Order 2013 on Brunei's education curriculum, and how has the Bruneian government facilitated the implementation of these reforms while promoting Islamic education to non-Muslims to foster a multicultural society? This research question encompasses both the acts done (reforms) and the consequences or difficulties that have transpired. This analysis revealed several strengths that are in line with the objectives of multicultural education. Education all serves as avenues for aligning Islamic education with the objectives of multicultural education.

Although previous studies have examined Islamic education, national identity, and educational reform in Brunei, limited attention has been given to how the implementation of the Syariah Penal Code Order 2013 has influenced the education curriculum, particularly within Brunei's multicultural context. Existing literature has discussed the integration of Islamic values into education, but it has not sufficiently explained how these reforms are implemented by the government or how they relate to non-Muslim communities and multicultural educational aims. Therefore, this study addresses this gap by examining the impact of SPCO 2013 on Brunei's education curriculum and analyzing the government's role in facilitating Islamic education reforms while maintaining multicultural inclusivity.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Brunei Dual System of Education

Brunei has a dual education system that mixes secular academic education with religious education. Students in Brunei must complete both types of schooling. There are both public schools and religious schools through which compulsory education is provided to students. Religious schools in Brunei offer a specialized education centered on Islamic teachings, values, and principles. These institutions seek to foster a thorough understanding of Islam and its place in individuals' lives within the framework of Bruneian society. Religious schools often include several facets of Islamic education in their curricula, including Quranic Studies, *Fiqh* (Jurisprudence), *Aqidah* (Creed), Islamic Morality and Ethics, and Islamic History. While the religious schools in Brunei provide a more Islamic-centred education with their own curriculum, the public schools follow a curriculum that is similar to Western-style schools, with a focus on academic subjects such as mathematics, science, social studies, languages, and the arts. Besides secular subjects, Islamic education is also included in the curriculum of public schools. Islamic religious education is a requirement for all students, regardless of their background in another religion, in public schools. Learning about Islamic beliefs, tenets, values, and practices is a part of this education. This ensures that students have a fundamental understanding of Islam and its place in the culture and society of the nation.

In Brunei, it is important to incorporate religious education within the curriculum. This Islamic education is often part of the regular school day for students and is essential

for fostering a strong Islamic identity in Brunei's youth. All children in Brunei are required to attend public schools where they are given a solid foundation of information and abilities that are crucial for their entire growth and future endeavors, whether they are in further education or in the workforce. Religious and secular schools have various educational objectives and priority areas. Religious schools place a greater emphasis on fostering students' spiritual and moral development than formal schools (Haji Mail, 2019) that are designed to provide a multifaceted education that prepares students for further study and employment.

Both public schools and religious schools have been operating in Brunei since the 1930s (Haji Mail et al., 2019). Both religious and public schools are significant because they offer various educational opportunities that are pertinent to the requirements and goals of students with diverse aptitudes (Lubis et al., 2009). Overall, Religious schools in Brunei place a larger priority on religious instruction, morals, and a close relationship to faith. In contrast, Brunei's public schools provide a more varied curriculum to prepare students for further education and facing the problems of contemporary, diverse society. Both schools have a significant impact and, therefore, play crucial roles in shaping individuals' education, values, and future opportunities.

2.2. The Brunei Law Related to Education

The reformation of education in Brunei is necessitated by Acts and Orders related to education. Table 1 shows the respective Act and Order under Brunei law chapters that are related to Brunei education. This table also illustrates the timeline of the related Acts and Orders prior to the introduction of the SPCO 2013 in the year 2013. These related Acts and Orders are included for discussion, as well as the findings of this study.

Table 1: Educational Law Prior to the Implementation of SPCO 2013

No	Existing Education-Related Law Before 2013	Education-Related Law Added In 2013
1	<p>Education Act (Chapter 210) Section 32 on Islamic Education:</p> <p>(1) A student who practices Islam at school must receive Islamic education.</p> <p>(2) Islamic education must follow <i>Ahlis Sunnah Waljamah's</i> teachings in order to be provided in conformity with subsection (1)'s requirements.</p> <p>(3) "Islamic Education," as used in this section, refers to a subject covering <i>fardhu 'ain-</i> and <i>fardhu kifaya-</i>related topics.</p>	<p>Compulsory Religious Education Act (Chapter 215):</p> <p>mandates that all Muslim children receive religious instruction for seven years.</p> <p>According to the Act, every parent whose child has reached the mandatory religious school age must make sure the child enrolls in a religious school that year and stays there for the duration of the mandatory religious education.</p>
2	<p>Education (Compulsory Attendance) Order (2012):</p> <p>This order mandates that children between the ages of 6 and 16 must attend school. It is</p>	

compulsory for parents or guardians to ensure that their children attend school.

Note: Adapted from "Laws of Brunei", by Attorney General's Chambers Brunei Darussalam, 2015 <https://www.agc.gov.bn/AGC%20Site%20Pages/Laws%20of%20Brunei.aspx>

The above table grouped the education-related laws prior to and since the implementation of SPCO 2013. The education-related column before 2013 categorized the law that existed before the introduction of SPCO 2013. The Education Act (Chapter 210) Section 32 on Islamic Education and Education (Compulsory Attendance) Order (2012) is under this category. The Education Act on Islamic Education emphasizes that Muslim students must receive Islamic education at schools which follow *Ahlis Sunnah Waljamah's*¹ teachings and cover *fardhu 'ain*- and *fardhu kifaya*-related topics.² Here, though only Muslim students are required to receive religious studies, there are non-Muslims voluntarily attending the religious school. Secondly, the Education (Compulsory Attendance) Order (2012) stated that it is mandatory for parents and guardians to send their children from 6 to 16 years old to school. The school, in this case, refers to the formal primary and secondary school. However, prior to the commencement of SPCO 2013, the additional Act, as enforced on 1st January 2013, was the Compulsory Religious Education Act (Chapter 215). Under this Act, it is now compulsory for all Muslim parents to send their children to attend religious schools for all the years during the education period. Under this Act, parents or guardians who fail to send their children to school constitute a criminal offense under Bruneian law, and those found guilty may be subject to a \$5,000 maximum fine, up to a year in prison, or both. Comparing the existing education-related law to this newly added Act in the year 2013, it can be concluded that this additional Act is more stern than before and that Muslim parents are now obliged to follow this new regulation. This new Act strengthens not just the religious study but also improves the foundation of Islamic knowledge among Muslims in Brunei. This new Act also helps to increase the number of Muslims who are equipped with fundamental Islamic backgrounds, and this may, in the longer term, prepare them for SPCO 2013.

2.3 Significant Steps to Reform Education

Brunei has undergone significant educational reforms in recent years to enhance the quality of education and prepare its students for the future. Education reforms are modifications made to the educational systems with the intention of making them better. Revitalizing the educational system is aimed at yielding a myriad of favorable outcomes,

¹ People of the Prophet's Way and the Community (*Ahl al-Sunnah wa'l-Jama'ah*)

² *Fardhu 'ain* are legal obligations that must be performed by each individual Muslim, including prayer, charity, fasting, and pilgrimage. *Fardhu kifaya* are legal obligation that must be discharged by the Muslim community as a whole, such as military struggle; if enough members in the Muslim community discharge the obligation, the remaining Muslims are freed from the responsibility before God.

given its paramount significance in shaping the trajectory of a society's future development. According to Ziminski (2014), educational reforms offer a chance to bring about long-lasting and positive change in schools. They raise its efficacy, relevance, and quality (Goertz, 1995). Among the important reforms is the introduction in 2014 of a new educational system called the SPN21 (21st Century National Education System), which is a new educational framework designed to prepare students for the challenge of the twenty-first century. The new system places a strong emphasis on cultivating 21st-century abilities like communication, problem-solving, and critical thinking. Phan et al. (2021) stated the need to balance the preservation of cultural heritage with the demands of globalization. By acknowledging and respecting Brunei's cultural identity while embracing global trends in education, the country can embody the principles of multicultural education. Phan et al. (2021) emphasized that balancing traditional values with global competencies will provide all students with opportunities for educational advancement. By addressing disparities in educational access and outcomes, Brunei can promote social justice and equality within its multicultural society. The promotion of social mobility, the reduction of inequality, and the enhancement of health and well-being can all be significantly aided by education. Secondly, Brunei has recognized the importance of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education to prepare students for the future job market (Ministry of Education, Brunei Darussalam - Brunei Darussalam Leadership and Teacher Academy (BDLTA), 2024).

Accordingly, the government has started a number of programs to advance STEM education, such as the creation of the iCentre, which gives students who are interested in STEM jobs access to resources and support. The iCentre Incubation Programme is a one-year incubation program by Darussalam Enterprise (DARe) and a co-working space for existing and aspiring entrepreneurs with access to capacity-building programs, scaling, and investment opportunities (iCentre, DARe Darussalam Enterprise, 2024). Another initiative in reforming Brunei education is professional development for teachers. In order to ensure that teachers have the abilities and knowledge necessary to provide students with high-quality instruction, the Bruneian government has invested in their professional development (Ministry of Education, Brunei Darussalam - Brunei Darussalam Leadership and Teacher Academy, 2024). The Brunei Teacher Academy is one of the initiatives the Ministry of Education has launched to improve the abilities of teachers. The government's further initiative to improve the education of the country is in terms of its e-learning efforts, an initiative which was vigorously undertaken to mitigate the effects of COVID-19. In order to improve the way that education is delivered, Brunei has also established a number of e-learning initiatives. For instance, the Brunei Darussalam Educational Resources Portal (BDERP), which offers a platform for students and teachers to access educational resources and materials, was launched by the Ministry of Education (Brunei

Darussalam Leadership and Teacher Academy, 2023). At the Universiti Brunei Darussalam, the International and Comparative Education (ICE) Research Group has been hosting weekly ICE seminars and workshops on subjects like pedagogical innovations and challenges, technological access in education, support for teaching and learning, and impacts on research and internationalization (Noorashid et al., 2020). To ensure that the educational system in Brunei is in line with the demands of society, the government, educators, and other stakeholders are encouraged to work cooperatively.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design

The investigation was done using descriptive qualitative research (Creswell & Tashakkori, 2007; Creswell et al., 2003) in order to obtain a clearer picture of the research by employing the qualitative data that provides a better understanding and explanation of the research questions stated below (Salehi & Golafshani, 2010).

3.2. Participants of the Study

The participants of this study are high-level government officers who are experts in the development of respective departments or units and are nominated by their respective departments or units to participate in this study. The selected participants represent their departments or units for which they are considered legally responsible. The departments are selected based on the relevance of this study, which focuses on the Brunei education curriculum, and thus, the selected departments and units are from the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Religious Affairs, which reflect both public and religious schools.

Table 2: Participants for Interview Sessions

No	Name of Department/Unit	Functions of Department/Unit
1	Department of Co-Curriculum Education, Ministry of Education	Serving as a centre for planning and carrying out projects, as well as providing inspiration for all extra activities at the primary and secondary levels.
2	Department of Curriculum Development, Ministry of Education	The department offers high-quality teaching resources in accordance with the current demands and trends and develops and distributes high-quality curriculums that are based on the needs and aspirations of the nation and helps to diversify the curriculum's teaching and learning resources.
3	Special Project Unit, Ministry of Education	Specialised unit responsible for programmes, projects, and initiatives of the Department of Curriculum Development under the Ministry of Education.
4	Department of Planning,	Liable for research that is both evidence and policy

	Development and Research, Ministry of Education	based in order to support policy development and revision that is in line with Brunei Vision 2035 and the Ministry of Education's strategic direction.
5	Ministry of Religious Affairs	Manage the Religious School Curriculum's formulation and execution.

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3.3. Instruments

Semi-structured interviews were conducted for this study, and qualitative data was acquired from these interviews. Semi-structured interviews are effective when it is necessary to obtain detailed information (Adams, 2015). Semi-structured interview questions for this study are shown in Table 2. This table also identifies the question type for each interview question.

Table 3: Interview Questions, Objectives, and Question Type

No	Questions	Objectives	Question Type
1	What are the most significant changes in your department when the SPCO 2013 was introduced?	To obtain the main and immediate impact of the implementation of the SPCO 2013.	Open-ended
2a)	Is there any action taken by your department to coordinate with the SPCO 2013?	To know whether any action has been taken post-SPCO 2013 implementation.	Closed-ended
2b)	What kind of action has been taken by your department?	To obtain a list of corresponding actions post SPCO 2013 implementation.	Open-ended
3a)	Is there any future action to be taken by your department that needs to be in line with the SPCO 2013?	To know whether any action has been taken as part of moving forward.	Closed-ended
3b)	What kind of future action has your department taken?	To obtain a list of future actions related to the implementation of SPCO 2013.	Open-ended

The qualitative data aims to make it possible to comprehend the phenomenon in its native environment more thoroughly (Creswell, 2013). Describe what, how, and to whom the instrument was used in the study. Describe what, how, and to whom the instruments were used in the study.

3.4. Data Analysis Techniques

The interview questions were designed in a semi-structured format based on the needs of this study. The questions are intended to allow participants to express their experiences and perspectives freely. The responses were analyzed using a descriptive qualitative approach, in which the participants' answers were organized, described, and interpreted according to recurring themes found in the data. Through this process, the study presents the participants' views in a clear and systematic manner.

4. Results

4.1. The significant changes to the syllabus in the education curriculums of both public and religious schools (Increase in Islamic education)

The information gathered from the participants with regard to the main impact when the SPCO 2013 was introduced is discussed below. The responses from the participants are grouped into themes in Table 4. The themes are named according to the responses collected.

Table 4: Thematic Analysis of Responses to Question 1

Code	Theme
Revision of Education Curriculum	
Revision of syllabus content	Revising curriculum
Revising academic policies	
Incorporating Islamic values into the syllabus	
Developing special student activities related to Islamic values	Islamic values
Producing Islamic book	

The findings indicate that the relevant departments and units under the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Religious Affairs are working towards the aims of revising the curriculum and incorporating Islamic values into the education system. According to Gilbert (2010), reforming education curricula is an initiative to appraise or update the content of information, including its selection and arrangement and related concerns pertaining to student learning where it is necessary for curriculum to change over time. The Brunei government's actions, as reported in this study, were precisely in line with this. The government recognized the need to revise the curriculum, and the related departments made efforts to incorporate Islamic values into the curriculum in accordance with the SPCO 2013. One of the noticeable changes with regard to education during the period post-SPCO 2013 was to include *Janayah* (Crime and Punishment) in the syllabus of religious schools from 2015 (Haji Othman, 2016). This is also supported by one of the actions taken by the Ministry of Religious Affairs that all religious studies books under religious schools from pre-primary to primary year 6 have been revised and published in

2013 and used nationally (Department of Islamic Studies of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2013).

4.2. The SPCO 2013 Compliance Actions by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Cooperation between ministries to promote Islamic education)

The findings of the second observation are divided into two parts. The first part focuses on any actions that were taken after the SPCO had started and will be taken in the future in line with the SPCO 2013. All participants (100%) agreed that subsequent actions were taken after the introduction of the SPCO 2013, and plans were being made for future action. This result is supported by further findings from the second part, from which lists of actions taken post-SPCO 2013 are obtained. Responses are coded and themed based on the responses of the participants, as shown in Table 5. From these interviews, it is found that all related departments and units are very supportive of the SPCO 2013 implementations and have managed to incorporate Islamic values into the educational curriculum.

Table 6: Thematic Analysis of Responses to Question 2 and Question 3

Name of Department/ Unit	Code				Theme
	Q2 a	Q2b Action(S) That Has Been Taken	Q3 a	Q3b Future Action(S)	
Department of Co-Curriculum Education, Ministry of Education and Department of Curriculum Development, Ministry of Education	Yes	Incorporating Islamic values in religious subjects, extra-curricular activities, and relevant education curriculum from primary to higher education	Yes	Revising and developing curriculum in relation to the SPCO 2013 requirements	Curriculum
Special Project Unit, Ministry of Education	Yes	Incorporating Islamic values into teacher and teaching guidelines	Yes	Producing educators who will incorporate Islamic values in the curriculum	Curriculum
Department of Planning, Development and Research, Ministry of Education	Yes	Educational research	Yes	Conduct academic research in compliance with the requirements of the SPCO 2013	Curriculum

Ministry of Religious Affairs	Yes	Revising syllabus for subjects taught in religious schools Publishing new religious textbooks for religious schools	Yes	Revising curriculum and amending syllabus in accordance with the SPCO 2013	Curriculum
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These cooperative actions on curriculum materials (syllabuses, textbooks, integrated Islamic values) as part of curriculum reform have been supported by Superfine et al (2015) as part of the primary method for changing curriculum. Oates (2014) also concluded that materials that provide clear guidelines support the implementation of the new curriculum by concentrating on students' learning progress and lowering any ambiguity and anxiety that may arise from a new curriculum. On the other hand, the reform could be seen as a way to respond to particular tasks. It would be challenging to systematically update the curriculum if there was no agreement on these fundamental educational values (Benavot, 2011). In the context of education, these actions can have significant impacts on both the educational system and the students. Islamic compliance actions can influence the development of the curriculum by ensuring that it aligns with Islamic principles and values. This can include incorporating Islamic history, literature, and other related subjects into the curriculum. Assert that Islamic studies programs can aid in the development of people who are informed about other cultures and traditions. The goal of Islamic studies programs is to give students a thorough grasp of Islam and its historical and cultural significance, according to a study by Abushouk & Mohieldin (2020). This can promote the values of honesty, integrity, and responsibility, which are essential components of Islamic teachings. These values can be instilled in students, shaping their ethical and moral standards. Islamic compliance initiatives in education taken by the government of Brunei can aid in addressing social injustices and inequalities because Islam advocates for social justice. Students can be informed about problems such as poverty, infringement of human rights, and prejudice through education, empowering them to act against these situations. Besides, this can foster a sense of community among students, promoting respect and inclusiveness. This can help to create a more harmonious and collaborative learning environment.

4.3 The Significant Changes in Education Law Prior to the SPCO 2013 (Additional law to strengthen Islamic Education)

The third observation under this study is the impact of the SPCO 2013, which leads to certain laws being included in the Education Law, as per Table 1. The latest additional Act under the Education Law was the Compulsory Religious Education Act (Chapter 215). According to this Act, all Muslim pupils in Brunei are required to attend religious classes provided by authorized Islamic teachers. Providing Muslim pupils in Brunei with a good foundation in Islamic knowledge and morals is one of the goals of the Compulsory

Religious Education Act. Developing a generation of Muslims who are aware of their religion and capable of practicing it properly will strengthen their faith and instill in them a sense of pride in being Muslims. The new law encourages Muslim pupils to act morally and with decent manners (Brunei law, Chapter 215 Compulsory Religious Education, 2012). Moreover, preceding the implementation of the SPCO 2013, another notable change was the mandate for compulsory inclusion of Islamic education in all schools, including non-religious schools. This meant that all students in Brunei, regardless of their religious backgrounds, were required to take Islamic studies courses as part of their curriculum. This requirement was required by the Brunei Education Act of 2012, which covers subjects including the Qur'an, Islamic history, and Islamic beliefs and practices in the curriculum of formal schools as part of promoting Islamic education and strengthening its Islamic identity. This promotion also helps to increase awareness among non-Muslim students about Bruneian society and avoid misapprehension of the SPCO 2013.

Learning about Islam assists the non-Muslims in overcoming prejudices and stereotypes that may be based on false or inadequate information. Non-Muslims can gain a deeper understanding of these topics and a greater appreciation for the diversity of Islamic thinking and practices by studying the religion and its texts. Understanding Islam is a crucial first step in fostering more respect and cooperation between people of all faiths and backgrounds. Non-Muslims can contribute to mutual understanding and the advancement of a more harmonious and inclusive society by overcoming prejudices and biases and developing a greater awareness of the diversity of Islamic philosophy and practice. This also helps Muslim students to understand the essence of their religion and embrace others with a genuine understanding of the diversity of faiths, cultures, and traditions in their own country. It is expected that steps taken by the government will help create a harmonious society where various faiths can coexist and interact with one another with mutual respect and understanding. Thus, the educational reforms undertaken by the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Religious Affairs and other bodies will help to raise the standard of education, promote character building, and attain societal harmony. Armstrong (2006) highlighted the significance of appreciating and comprehending religious traditions and stressed that the understanding of the similarities and differences between different faiths promotes greater respect and tolerance among people of diverse backgrounds and helps to build a peaceful and harmonious society.

5. Discussion

5.1 Bruneian Education from a Multicultural Perspective

Brunei is a multireligious, multiethnic, and multicultural country. The largest ethnic group in Brunei is the Malays, and they consist of the following ethnic and indigenous groups: Brunei, Belait, Tutong, Kedayans, Bisayas, Dusuns, and Muruts (Brunei Darussalam Statistical Yearbook 2008, p. 13). Alongside these groups, a significant non-indigenous population includes diverse Chinese communities, while various Indian communities also exist as a distinct non-indigenous presence. Furthermore, Brunei's government and public

sector witnessed a substantial influx of expatriates from Western and Asian countries (Poedjosoedarmo, 2004). According to the government's 2021 census, there are 441,000 residents in the country; 82.1 percent of the population are Muslim, 8.7 percent Christian, and 7.8 percent Buddhist, while the remaining 4.7 percent consist of other religions, including indigenous beliefs.

Residing as a non-Muslim in an Islamic country offers a distinctive and globally noteworthy viewpoint on multiculturalism. The presence of diverse religious and cultural communities in Islamic nations cultivates an atmosphere characterized by diversity and tolerance. According to historian Akbar Ahmed, Islamic civilizations have traditionally served as hubs for cultural interchange, where individuals from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds peacefully coexist and exchange their customs (Ahmed, 2018). Brunei's Islamic education safeguards the rights of religious minorities through its policies that prioritize Islamic values and incorporate them into its curricula. This aligns with the principle of multicultural education, which states that Islamic governments seek to emphasize the need to nurture an inclusive society in which people of all faiths can peacefully coexist (Ahmed, 2018). Legislative frameworks and initiatives designed to protect the cultural practices and rights of non-Muslim communities in Brunei validate this commitment. In addition, Brunei offers a multicultural experience that transcends religious coexistence and encompasses a multitude of facets of everyday existence, such as traditions, cuisine, language, and art. The rich tapestry of Islamic culture is accessible and observable by non-Muslim residents, thereby fostering the growth and development of intercultural competencies. This form of exposure serves to not only augment their comprehension of the immediate surroundings but also fosters an international outlook by illustrating the interdependence of various cultures within the wider human condition.

The people of Brunei possess a rich tapestry of identities stemming from multiple cultural influences and historical periods. These identities are intertwined with linguistic and cultural resources and are deeply embedded in the complex socio-political processes that have unfolded within and across these historical epochs. Saxena notes, "While the ethnolinguistic diversity practices continue to be a part of the sociolinguistic ecology of Brunei" (Saxena, 2006, p. 151). Saxena further observes that it is subject to convergent forces of national identity, multilingual identity, and multicultural identity.

"... the policy pressures from above and diverse forms of sociolinguistic practices from below are constructing, deconstructing, and reconstructing Bruneians' multilingual and multicultural identities. They are in some ways fluid, permeable, and changeable, while in other ways fixed, solid and dependable" (Saxena, 2006, p.157).

In order to strengthen the fundamental unity of the country that consists of diverse cultures, faiths, ethnic groups, and ideologies, it is important that there should be a common commitment to an agreed form of multiculturalism, for which the education of the country should be grounded in an explicit commitment to some shared values, practices and procedures. This also can be seen when Brunei introduced the "Melayu Islam

Beraja (MIB)" ideology in 1984, integrated Islamic values into the national educational framework, prioritizing Malay customs and Islamic teachings. The MIB framework fosters social cohesion by advocating for reverence towards authority, equity, and reciprocal respect. MIB promotes harmonious coexistence among Brunei's varied ethnic and cultural groups by advocating values that build tolerance and understanding. This is particularly vital in a multicultural society, where diverse ethnic groups may own distinct traditions and beliefs. This contributes to the formation of a cohesive society in which citizens are united by common values and heritage (Sharbawi & Mabud, 2021). MIB fosters loyalty and pride in national traditions by emphasizing these elements.

While MIB plays a significant role in maintaining Brunei's cultural heritage and national identity, it faces challenges in balancing tradition with the demands of a modern, multicultural, and globalized world. The emphasis on Islamic content may restrict the comprehensive development of critical thinking skills, awareness of diversity, and global perspectives, which are vital in contemporary education (Besar, 2016). The predominance of Islamic education in Brunei is crucial to the national identity. However, it generates tension with the principles of multicultural education that emphasize inclusion and representation of diverse cultural groups. The implementation of Shariah law in 2013 represented a pivotal change in Brunei's educational system. The implementation of Shariah law in Brunei, particularly since 2013, has notably influenced the domain of Islamic education. This action further solidified the Islamic orientation of the nation's educational policies, potentially limiting the scope for multicultural values. Research conducted by Ahmad (2021) and Hoon (2021) suggests that although Islamic education is vital to national identity, there are apprehensions about the potential marginalization of non-Muslim and non-Malay students within a framework that emphasizes Shariah-aligned curricula. Brunei has recently implemented measures to incorporate multicultural elements into its educational framework. This indicates that the government has implemented programs designed to enhance intercultural understanding and encourage social harmony among its various ethnic groups. These efforts are frequently regarded as supplementary to the core Islamic curriculum rather than being fully integrated within it.

The government has promoted a curriculum aligning with Islamic principles, integrating Shariah-based values into religious and secular subjects. The focus on Islamic values promotes national cohesion. However, it may inadvertently marginalize non-Muslim communities, resulting in a monocultural curriculum that inadequately reflects the nation's cultural and religious diversity. Proponents of Shariah-aligned curriculum reforms contend that such reforms provide stability, social harmony, and moral guidance, especially in a context characterized by moral and ethical dilemmas. Brunei's education system is evolving to comply with Shariah law; however, integrating Islamic education with multicultural goals presents a considerable challenge. Thus, the integration of Islamic education with multicultural goals requires careful consideration and balance between promoting cultural and religious diversity while also upholding the principles of Shariah law. This delicate balance is crucial in ensuring that Brunei's education system remains

inclusive and reflective of the nation's diverse population. This challenge highlights the need for ongoing dialogue and collaboration between educators, policymakers, and community stakeholders to create a curriculum that meets the needs of all students in Brunei.

5.2 Islamic Education and Multicultural Values: Synergy or Tension for Brunei?

The interplay between Islamic education and multicultural values in Brunei presents a complex landscape where the nation's identity as a predominantly Muslim society coexists with its rich ethnic diversity. Grounded in the philosophy of a MIB, Brunei's education system emphasizes Islamic teachings while also addressing the multicultural fabric of its population. This duality raises questions about whether the integration of multicultural principles within Islamic education promotes social cohesion and tolerance or leads to tensions over conflicting values (Tan, 2014).

A significant advantage is in the prioritization of Islamic principles of tolerance and justice, which can be utilized to foster comprehension and harmonious cohabitation across various ethnic and religious communities. Islamic Education in Brunei does intrinsically promote the values of respect and compassion towards others, which can be effectively integrated with the goals of multicultural education that aim to establish peaceful relationships in a diverse community (Murtadho, 2020). When discussing educational reforms and cultural integration in Islamic countries, the question of whether multicultural ideals and Islamic education work in tandem or are at odds with one another frequently arises. Furthermore, Brunei's advocacy for religious moderation is in line with wider intercultural objectives (Hidayah, 2022). Through its emphasis on a moderate understanding of Islam, the administration promotes a harmonious coexistence of Islamic devotion and reverence for other cultural customs. The manifestation of this strategy can be observed in religious moderation initiatives that advocate for harmonious cohabitation among the diverse ethnic groups in Brunei. This presents the government with a chance to incorporate multicultural ideals within the Islamic instructional framework. Research indicates that implementing such strategies can enhance societal unity and mitigate possible conflicts that may emerge from religious and cultural disparities (Matzin, 2021).

Conversely, certain scholars contend that there are inherent tensions between Islamic education and multicultural values, particularly in more orthodox Islamic contexts where religious identity is more important than pluralistic objectives. This tension is particularly apparent in countries such as Brunei and Saudi Arabia, where Islamic education systems prioritize the preservation of religious orthodoxy. For instance, Al-Atawneh & Ali (2020) discovered that in Saudi Arabia, the emphasis on Sharia-based education frequently restricts the promotion of multicultural values, particularly in the context of gender roles and interfaith dialogue. In this context, the enforcement of moral values and the preservation of religious sanctity are considered to be of the utmost importance, which can impede efforts to promote diversity and pluralism. Critical pedagogy, as articulated by Freire (1970), promotes an educational framework that encourages students to interrogate

and contest societal conventions. In the context of Brunei, this may involve prompting students to interact thoughtfully with Islamic teachings alongside multicultural values, cultivating a discourse that enhances comprehension rather than discord. Through the promotion of thoughtful discourse, educators can assist students in exploring the intricacies of their identities, thus mitigating potential conflicts while cultivating a sense of community.

Thus, the relationship between Islamic education and multicultural values in Brunei is characterized by both synergy and tension. While Islamic education provides a strong moral foundation, it is essential to incorporate multicultural principles that recognize and respect the diversity within the nation. As demonstrated through various studies and theoretical frameworks, fostering a critical dialogue around these themes can lead to a more harmonious society. To achieve this balance, policymakers and educators in Brunei must consider revising curricula to reflect a more inclusive perspective that honors the country's Islamic identity while embracing its multicultural realities. The path forward will require collaboration among communities, educators, and policymakers to create an educational landscape that nurtures both Islamic values and multicultural understanding, ultimately enriching Brunei's national identity and social fabric.

5.3 Curriculum Reforms and the Future of Multicultural Education in Brunei

The Bruneian government has adopted various strategies to ensure the effective implementation of the SPCO2013 and its influence on the education curriculum while also advancing Islamic education among non-Muslims. The Ministry of Education has undertaken a significant initiative to amend the curriculum to align with the tenets of the SPCO 2013. This encompasses the creation of educational resources that integrate Islamic principles while fostering an appreciation for diversity. While Islamic education constitutes a fundamental aspect of the curriculum, measures have been implemented to guarantee that non-Muslim students receive an education that honors their beliefs and cultural contexts. The equilibrium is crucial for preserving social cohesion within a heterogeneous society, facilitating the harmonious coexistence of Islamic values and multicultural principles (Hussain, 2015).

Moreover, the curricular reforms that prioritize intercultural interpretation in disciplines offer an additional opportunity to advance diversity. Although Islamic teachings are the prevailing influence, the incorporation of Brunei's varied cultural heritage in these disciplines enables students to develop an appreciation for the nation's multicultural composition. This endeavor aligns with UNESCO's education for global citizenship concept, which advocates for the incorporation of cultural diversity into national curricula to foster tolerance and understanding among various groups (Nakaya, 2021). This is also supported by an analysis by Smith & Ahmad (2022), published in the *International Journal of Islamic Education*, which examines the effects of governmental measures promoting religious moderation. This strategy has effectively facilitated the incorporation of multicultural principles into Islamic schools, prioritizing the acceptance of diversity while

upholding religious doctrines. Nevertheless, this often necessitates sophisticated tactics to guarantee that religious communities perceive their customs as valued while embracing multicultural principles.

Collectively, although Brunei government regulations have effectively advanced multicultural principles in Islamic education in certain situations, there remain notable obstacles. The findings indicate that collaboration between educational institutions and legislators is necessary to formulate regulations that are adaptable enough to incorporate local religious traditions while simultaneously promoting an inclusive and multicultural atmosphere. This is consistent with wider concepts of multicultural education, which support the use of instructional methods that are tailored to the cultural and religious background of the learners in order to prevent feelings of isolation and opposition. Successful key techniques include collaborative learning, student participation, and a critical analysis of Islamic and multicultural concepts to promote mutual respect and understanding in heterogeneous communities (Graham & Howard, 2021).

Therefore, this analysis uncovered several strengths that align with multicultural education goals, including the SPCO2013-driven reforms and the emphasis on ethical and moral education, which is universally relevant across different religious and cultural groups. Islamic teachings, central to Brunei's curriculum, promote values such as respect, justice, and compassion, which are critical in multicultural education. Another notable strength is found in the emphasis on civic responsibility, which is intricately woven into both the Islamic and multicultural education of Brunei. The curriculum underscores the importance of citizenship, social justice, and ethical conduct, fostering in students the qualities of responsible individuals who actively contribute to a harmonious society. This corresponds with the overarching objectives of multicultural education, which aim to enable students to participate actively and responsibly in their communities (Banks, 2016).

While the existing promotion of Islamic education in Brunei's educational curriculum, there is a distinct gap in examining the full impact of SPCO2013 on fostering multiculturalism within the educational system. Specifically, there is limited investigation on how Islamic education reforms integrate non-Muslim perspectives and promote cross-cultural understanding in schools. This highlights the need for further studies on how Shariah-based educational reforms can foster a more inclusive and diverse educational environment. This critical examination of government legislation reveals tensions between standard educational policies and the goals of equitable, inclusive education. While existing laws have their merits, achieving the transformative goals of an inclusive educational system requires balancing regulatory frameworks with critical analysis, diverse perspectives, and collaborative input. By thoughtfully adapting and revising legislative approaches, policymakers can better navigate the complexities of advancing justice and equity in education.

The present focus on Islamic education, although beneficial for imparting moral and ethical principles, may restrict students' engagement with the cultural diversity that

characterizes the global landscape. Gropello & Yeung (2020) assert that Bruneian students need to develop intercultural competencies that extend beyond national and religious boundaries to effectively compete in the international arena. Brunei's curriculum reforms, which align educational practices with Shariah law, reflect the government's dedication to advancing Islamic values. Nonetheless, the changing requirements of a multicultural and global society necessitate that Brunei develop methods to incorporate multicultural education within its Islamic framework. Brunei's alignment of its curriculum with Shariah law has strengthened its Islamic identity. However, the government encounters considerable challenges in fostering multicultural inclusivity. The prevalence of Islamic education within the curriculum, alongside the insufficient representation of minority cultures, poses challenges in reconciling national identity with the multicultural dynamics of Bruneian society. Insights from Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore illustrate the feasibility of sustaining a robust Islamic foundation alongside the promotion of cultural diversity and global citizenship. To fully realize the benefits of multicultural education, Brunei's future curriculum reforms must incorporate inclusive policies that reflect the nation's cultural diversity and foster intercultural understanding. Addressing these limitations is essential for ensuring that Brunei's education system upholds Islamic values while also preparing students for the challenges and opportunities presented by a diverse and interconnected world.

The kind of information and skills that are most important for the preservation and promotion of its cultures and traditions should be passed on to future generations. According to a widely held perspective on the educational curriculum, it should be taught with the overarching goal of "standardizing" society's behaviors by exposing students to its traditions and rituals (Beyer & Liston, 1996; Borrowman, 1989; Glatthorn, 1998; Tanner & Tanner, 1999). The importance of change in curriculum lies in its ability to respond to the evolving needs of students and society. Revising the curriculum is crucial because it ensures that education remains relevant and responsive to the requirements of both students and society. In other words, a curriculum represents a broader social and political agreement (Amadio et al., 2016), and as society matures and changes, so should the curriculum. The impact of law on curriculum can vary depending on the country or region in question, as well as the specific laws being implemented.

As regards the present study, revisions to the curriculum in accordance with the SPCO2013 have had a substantial influence on the content of Islamic studies courses. An accurate interpretation of the Shariah law was emphasized in the new curriculum, and Islamic morality and ethics received more attention. The inclusion of Islamic education in different areas of the curriculum post-SPCO 2013 encourages a greater understanding of religion and its principles for the benefit of all. This may contribute to the development of a more varied and inclusive learning environment. Islamic education can also help students become more culturally aware, allowing them to appreciate and comprehend the traditions and customs of Islamic societies (Al-Musa & Al-Qudah, 2021). Students can learn about the values of tolerance and respect and understand others with various views and

cultures through Islamic education. By promoting education in Islamic studies, students can become better equipped to address contemporary issues. Therefore, increasing Islamic education in the curriculum can have a positive impact on both students and society. It can create a more inclusive and tolerant learning environment while promoting critical thinking skills and cultural awareness (Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2020).

Secondly, the SPCO 2013 directly necessitated the cooperation between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Brunei to work on new educational initiatives to ensure that educational practices align with Islamic principles and values. Cooperation between the two ministries can lead to the development of a more comprehensive and integrated curriculum that incorporates secular and religious education in a more meaningful way. This can help to promote a more balanced and inclusive education system. On the contrary, the collaboration between the two ministries holds the potential to advance multicultural education significantly. By fostering a culture of compassion through educational initiatives, this collaboration aims to instill values that promote harmony and celebrate diversity among students. This cooperation guarantees that students have a thorough and precise knowledge of religious beliefs. This can promote greater respect and leniency towards different religious beliefs and practices. Through careful allocation of resources and setting priorities for education, the government is trying its best to shape and support curriculum development and implementation and thus raise the educational standards of the country.

Moreover, Islamic education offers numerous benefits to non-Muslims and contributes significantly to multicultural education. One key advantage is its emphasis on promoting moral and ethical values that are universally applicable. This is also supported by Abdullahi & Arshad (2016), who argue that intercultural education in Islamic studies promotes the recognition and acceptance of diverse cultures and traditions, fostering an appreciation for these distinctions. Such comprehension and admiration can facilitate the advancement of social cohesion and mitigate bias and bigotry. Islamic teachings encourage virtues such as compassion, honesty, and justice, fostering a sense of shared humanity among students from diverse backgrounds. According to Abdullahi An-Na'im, a prominent scholar, Islamic education emphasizes the concept of the oneness of humanity, promoting respect for diversity and inclusivity (An-Na'im, 2010). Additionally, Islamic education often incorporates teachings on tolerance and understanding, providing students with a broad perspective on different cultures and belief systems. The focus on critical thinking and intellectual inquiry within Islamic education allows students, regardless of their faith, to engage in thoughtful discussions that promote mutual understanding and respect. Moreover, the emphasis on social justice and community service aligns with the goals of multicultural education by encouraging students to contribute actively to the well-being of society. In essence, Islamic education serves as a valuable bridge for fostering cultural awareness, understanding, and collaboration among individuals from diverse backgrounds. Therefore, in the case of Brunei education, some potential effects of introducing the new law are the achievement of the standardization of

education among various communities, institutions of learning, and students. This can help ensure that all students receive a similar level of education regardless of their location or socioeconomic background. Secondly, the Compulsory Education Law has many benefits for society as a whole. They ensure that all students, regardless of their backgrounds, have access to education, which helps to lessen social inequality. As a result, society may become more equal and conducive to everyone's success. Therefore, the Compulsory Education Law is essential for promoting individual and social well-being and ensuring a brighter future for all.

6. Conclusion

To conclude, this study investigates the impact of implementing the SPCO 2013 on the education curriculum in Brunei Darussalam. The effective implementation of the SPCO 2013 relating to education is critical for ensuring that students receive the education they need to succeed. The result of this study determines that the implementation of the SPCO 2013 has impacted Brunei's education in many ways. Brunei can develop an inclusive education system that values and respects cultural diversity by promoting an inclusive understanding of Islam, incorporating multicultural education into Islamic education, and developing inclusive curricula and teaching strategies. Thus, this approach is significant for balancing Islamic principles and the promotion of cultural variety in the context of Brunei. This is evident from the findings where measures have been taken by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Religious Affairs to support the implementation of SPCO 2013. The main outcome is the improvement in the contents of the curriculum of public and religious schools, with increased emphasis on incorporating Islamic values in the curriculum and enhancing the contents of Islamic studies. However, Brunei governments and education officials need to consider a range of factors in achieving the goals of Islamic education, such as funding, teacher training, monitoring and evaluation, and a long-term perspective. The effectiveness of the measures taken and the strategies adopted for realizing the cherished goals of developing a multicultural education in an Islamic environment need to be seriously studied. The effects on society can be enormous when the government and educational players collaborate.

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